



Creative

CORRECTION

Extraordinary Ideas for Everyday Discipline

Lisa Whelchel



Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
Wheaton, Illinois

CREATIVE CORRECTION

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ISBN 1-58997-128-0

A Focus on the Family book published by Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois.

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The author wishes to thank the many parents who have contributed creative correction ideas to this book, both in the original edition and in this revised version. Though these contributors have become too numerous to mention by name, their help is deeply appreciated and gratefully acknowledged.

Editors: Betsy Holt and Larry Weeden

Cover design and interior illustrations: Lovgren Advertising and John Duckworth

Printed in the United States of America

04 05 06 07 08/18 17 16 15 14 13 12

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Disclaimer

Before you begin reading this book, let's make a pact: If we ever run into each other's children on the streets—even if that means literally “on the streets”—let's not judge each other as bad parents. Let's give one another the benefit of the doubt. After all, we're doing the best we can. You've probably seen the bumper sticker “Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven.” Well, in light of this parenting pact, I propose a new one: “My children aren't perfect, but neither are yours.”

I remember one Sunday after church, my husband, Steve, and I were talking with the teachers from our parenting class. Our then four-year-old son, Tucker, came rushing out of Sunday school, having wriggled free from his grandfather's hand, and ran through the sanctuary, nearly knocking me over. All the while, he was talking loudly, hoping to get the adults to be quiet and listen to him. I shot him the “You're going to get it when you get home” look, but it was to no avail. He began entertaining himself by climbing onto the balcony rails, nearly falling into the lower sanctuary in the process. In less than two minutes, Steve and I had failed three of our parenting courses: “Teaching Your Children Church Etiquette,” “No Interrupting,” and “Learning Health and Safety.”

Embarrassed to even look our parenting teachers in the face, I scrambled for excuses. “Oh, it's time for his nap,” I said quickly. “He's probably coming down with something.” I should have just been honest and said, “He's not really our son.”

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Actually, that wouldn't be such a stretch: Tucker, like all of us, is a son of Adam, the first child on earth—so he comes by his sin naturally. In fact, the roots of misbehavior can be traced all the way back to Adam. Sin has less to do with our parenting ability and more to do with the state of our kids' hearts. After all, I would venture to guess that God was a good Father—yet both Adam and his wife, Eve, disobeyed Him. So don't feel guilty if your children aren't perfect. This is not a reflection on you and your parenting skills (or lack thereof!).

My purpose in writing *Creative Correction* is to give you hope, not a guilt complex. I've read a lot of self-help parenting books, and ironically, they often make me feel worse about myself as a parent. I'll pick one up, hoping to find some help—only to finish the book convinced that I'm a terrible mom because I haven't been doing all the things the author suggested. There are a lot of those books out there. Here are just a few I've run across:

- < Parenting books that promise to take my children from Billy the Kid to Billy Graham in 10 easy steps.
- < Parenting books that declare that their way is the only way, and if I don't follow this way, I'm doing it the wrong way.
- < Parenting books that promise that if I do everything right during my children's formative years, they will blossom as adults.
- < Parenting books that inform me that I've already passed the formative years and it's too late to make a difference.

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- < Parenting books that tell me to talk more, listen more, play more, read more, bake more, Rushmore, furthermore.
- < Parenting books that tell me to work less, buy less, worry less, nag less, eat less, doubtless, blameless.
- < And my personal favorite: parenting books that imply that there is one magic formula, and if I can ever find it and follow it perfectly, my children will turn out okay.

If you bought *Creative Correction* thinking you had finally found *the* book, please close it immediately and return it for a full refund. I'm not about to make false promises. If, on the other hand, you've realized that what works for one child may not necessarily work for another, and that some creativity is in order, *Creative Correction* is the book for you.

You love your children, and I love mine. So let's give each other room to try new things, learn from our failures, and find what works best for each of our kids.

By the way, if you ever find yourself at a red light behind a white minivan with a bumper sticker that reads, "My children aren't perfect, but neither am I," please honk. I'd love to meet you.

I received an e-mail from the editor of a magazine for which I had recently been interviewed. The note read: “Lisa, I’m reviewing the article and looking at everything you do, and I wonder at one quote. You say, ‘Moms must be careful not to attempt to do it all; you have to be willing to let a few things slide.’ May I ask, what on earth do you let slide?”

I e-mailed the following response:

Dear Susan,

There are lots of things that slide. I’m embarrassed at the things that get pushed to the bottom of the priority list. Let me name a few:

- < Healthy meals—tonight the kids had cereal for dinner.
- < The last time I did any “spring cleaning” was the spring of aught 5.
- < I desperately need to exercise, but I figure I log in at least 20 minutes a day on the “Stairmaster,” hauling laundry up to and down from the bedrooms.

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- < I promised my daughter a year ago that I would teach her to sew.
- < I've made the same New Year's resolution three years in a row—to have each of our neighbors over for dinner.
- < My latest obsession is scrapbooking, but I'm still cropping pictures of my kids from when they were in diapers.
- < I come from a long line of readers and yet even my magazines stack up by the bed, untouched (though they do make an attractive nightstand).
- < Thankfully, I'm not much of a shopper, so I don't lose time there; but then again, my wardrobe reflects that.
- < Wouldn't it be nice if I answered all those wonderful letters people send me?
- < My husband would be in heaven if I did my nails every week, but at this point he's going to have to wait until Jesus comes.
- < When I suggest, "Let's make some homemade cookies," we don't head for the mixer, we reach for the freezer and the sharpest "slice and bake" knife that's not in the dishwasher.
- < I really mean to write to my senators.
- < At the onset of Y2K, I embarked on a "Read through the Bible in a Decade" program. My goal is to reach the book of Habakkuk before my last child enters high school.

AFTER THE FACTS

Sound like anyone at your house? A lot has changed since my days playing “Blair” on *The Facts of Life*. Shortly after the birth of my third baby, an actress friend remarked to me, “After having worked for so many years, it must be nice to be able to relax and not work for a while.” I had three children in diapers at the time, and I was tempted to slap her with a wet wipe. Yeah, I’m leading a really “Pamper-ed” lifestyle these days.

Of course, I wouldn’t trade it for all the money in Hollywood. I love my life! I will always be grateful for the fun I had while I was on television, but it can’t compare with the joy I’m experiencing now.

I don’t remember ever making a conscious decision to quit show business and become a stay-at-home mom. In fact, I’d always assumed I would continue working even after I had children. But for some reason, I never got another job I auditioned for. Go figure! It might have had something to do with the fact that I was married during the last season of the show; then, for the first five years of my marriage, I was either pregnant, nursing, or trying to lose baby fat. By the time I was back in fighting shape, I had three adorable preschoolers below the belt—and that is where it would hit me if I had to leave them every day.

I am fortunate to be married to a wonderful man: Steve. He agreed to let me stay home while he continued his job as an associate pastor and director of information technologies at our church. Poor guy! He thought he was marrying a rich, young starlet. We were barely home from the honeymoon when he began saying good-bye each morning to an unemployed mommy with a baby in her arms, spit-up on her shoulders, an extra 10 pounds on her hips,

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and two tiny toddlers clinging to her legs. (By the way, honey, did I mention that I'm not a natural blonde?)

I don't think I will ever take for granted the privilege of being my children's mother and the opportunity to stay home with them. I consider it a luxury because I understand it is an option many families aren't able to afford. I've also walked with the Lord long enough to have learned that what is right for one family may not be what's best for another. Therefore, you won't find me making any judgments about working mothers. Who knows—I may be called back to work someday, too.

It sure would be hard to obey the Lord if He asked that of me, though. I love to watch my kids each day become more and more their own persons. I've often been told, "Enjoy them while they're young, because they grow up before you know it." I personally have not found that to be the case. It feels as if they've been small forever. But I'm enjoying every minute of their childhood.

HAVE YOU MET MY CHILDREN?

Let me introduce you to my little darlings. Steve has come up with a great way to describe our children: in color groups. Tucker, who is nine years old at the time of this writing, is our firstborn. He is your basic eight-pack of primary colors. Tucker is bold and original. You need fire? He's brimming with red. Could use a little sunshine? He exudes joyful yellow. You want green? He's full of life. I'm sorry, but he's rarely blue. Can I offer you some orange? Tucker is all the colors you really need in one place. No need for any big, fancy box with a built-in sharpener.

Haven, our eight-year-old daughter, is the middle child. She represents the jewel tones: the beautiful, rich, intricate shades. She

is as gorgeous as a scarlet rose, as deep as the forest green, and as complicated as the midnight-blue sky. And what a gem she is!

Clancy, our seven-year-old daughter, is the baby. We first considered pastels to describe her, because she's been so calm from the moment she was born. Our only hesitation was that lavender and sea-foam green don't do justice to her sparkling personality. Then Steve thought of fluorescents. Perfect! Crayola introduced the colors "neon carrot," "magic mint," and "razzle-dazzle rose" just in time to describe delightful Clancy.

Every year in our family Christmas letter, I include a quote from each of our children. It is usually a snippet of something they've said during the year that reflects their personalities at their current ages. It helps our friends and family stay in touch as the kids grow. Maybe it will create a quick snapshot for you, too.

In our last holiday letter, I shared this story about our son: The kids and I had just finished our morning prayer when Tucker asked, "So, what catalog does God order out of?"

"What are you talking about?" I asked.

With a smile sneaking out one side of his mouth, he quipped, "Well, you just asked God to order Grandmother's day. So I was wondering, will He simply call to the angels and say, 'I want a Tuesday and a Thursday, and send them over to Genny Coleman right away?'"

As you can tell, Tucker is a real jokester.

Last year was an exciting one for Haven. She finally lost her first tooth. She had been wiggling it for about a year. Actually, she started by fiddling with her two top teeth until I informed her that her bottom teeth would come out first. (Of course, Tucker heard me from across the room and, in typical big brother style, yelled, "Ooooh, yuck! Haven has teeth on her bottom?")

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Haven put her “bottom” tooth under her pillow with a note to the tooth fairy. I left the money and kept the tooth and letter to put in her memory box. Then I hid them in my brush drawer under Steve’s tray. The next morning, Haven borrowed my brush and found the note and tooth.

She raced down the stairs and, with a look of betrayal, said, “So you’re the one who left the money!”

I felt awful. Her first tooth and she had already discovered the secret. She’d never have the thrill of believing in the tooth fairy again. “Yes, honey,” I answered gently. “Are you disappointed?”

With folded arms, she replied, “Yes, I am. Now, I’m going to leave it under my pillow again, and this time let the tooth fairy get it!”

I already have Clancy’s quote for this year’s Christmas letter. Last summer, we took a family vacation and drove up the West Coast, because the girls were going to be in a friend’s wedding. On the drive back, we spent two days in San Francisco, where we were given the opportunity to stay in a lovely hotel. The chandeliers hanging in the lobby were bigger than our entire living room at home. The kids received backpacks, compliments of the hotel, filled with maps and literature about San Francisco.

As we were packing up to leave, Clancy came running to me in a panic. “Where are all the coupons that were in my backpack?” she cried.

I told her reassuringly, “I took them out to give them to Grandmother in case she wants to bring Uncle Casey back here later this summer.”

“But I need them!” she said.

My eyebrows rose. “Why?”

She crooked her little finger and motioned me down to her

face. Then she whispered in my ear, “Because I’m thinking about coming back here on my honeymoon.”

I hope these stories help you to formulate a composite of my little ones. You’ll have plenty of opportunities to fill in more of the details as you read along. After all, my children are the reason I’ve written this book in the first place.

IS HE ADHD OR AM I CRAZY?

From the moment of my first child’s conception, I started reading parenting books. Well, okay, maybe not right at that particular moment, but soon thereafter. I determined that if there was a right way to raise children, I was going to find it. Steve and I attended our first parenting classes before we began our Lamaze classes. We certainly didn’t want to ruin our child for life by neglecting a crucial ingredient in the first few months of infancy. We found out later that we had already blown it for our baby by not reading aloud Plato and playing classical music while he was in utero.

After Tucker was born, I continued to read books on every subject from colic to college. We also attended classes on high-chair manners and hosted water-baby swimming lessons. By the time Haven and Clancy showed up, Steve and I were parenting experts.

Life was rolling merrily along until the arrival of El Niño. (El Niño is an irregular weather phenomenon that brings massive amounts of rainfall and extreme humidity to usually arid areas, such as the American Southwest.) Tucker became even more irritable and hyperactive and often was uncontrollable. He had been somewhat moody in the past, but we had chalked up his erratic behavior to fatigue and crankiness. With the onset of El Niño, however, Tucker started to *wake up* that way.

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We assumed we were not being strict enough, so we buckled down more tightly. But our discipline would only send him screaming to his room, kicking toys along the way and slamming the door behind him. Even more confusing, the next day he would wake up and be the enjoyable, incredible, affectionate boy we had grown to know and love. It was like living with Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. We explored every possible explanation, visiting over a half-dozen specialists. Tucker went through 15 bottles of vitamins, nine months of allergy shots, six homeopathic remedies, five elders who prayed for healing, three weeks of elimination diets, two air-purification filters, and one natural-light box for seasonal affective disorder. The majority of the doctors diagnosed him with ADHD (attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder) and recommended medication.

But there was one glaring inconsistency. He was an absolute angel during the summer months. This had nothing to do with school, either. Early on we had noticed the pattern in his behavior, so we began home-schooling him during the summer and taking a break in the winter, when Tucker's ability to focus was next to nil. This approach had been relatively successful.

It wasn't until the next year, after El Niño had come and gone—leaving our family as if it had been hit by a tornado as opposed to a deluge of showers—that we realized the common thread: weather changes. Apparently, when the wind, rain, heat, or cold sets in, Tucker's allergies go haywire. Unfortunately, they have yet to make a rainy-day pill.

OUR TRAVELS ALONG THE PARENTING HIGHWAY

Until that stormy year, we had been zipping happily down the parenting highway. Our plan was to continue along the interstate—

but then we ran into the roadblock of Tucker’s “weather condition.” We had to pull off the road and map out an alternate route. We still knew where we wanted to end up: with happy, healthy kids who love God’s ways—we just had to find another way to get there.

Maybe you have run into roadblocks, as Steve and I did with our son. We had to come up with quite a few creative ways to get around the hurdles in order to keep moving forward—such as homeschooling Tucker through the summer to work around his allergy problems. Have you found yourself feeling as if you’ve tried everything with your child and you’re still facing the same obstacles? If so, take heart; this is a book *full of ideas* when you have *no idea* what to do!

Perhaps you’ve found yourself at a crossroad and don’t know which way to turn. You know what you want for your child, but you aren’t sure how to achieve those goals. Your desire is for someone to stop telling you where you’re supposed to be and to start telling you how to get there. It is my prayer that you find some practical direction in this book.

In fact, whether you’re facing a fork in the road, a dead end, or are completely lost, don’t give up. It might simply be time to forge a new path ahead or pick up the map and discover where you veered off course. If you feel overwhelmed, let me come alongside and remind you of what you already know to be true but, in the confusion of a “superhighway” lifestyle, lost sight of along the way.

TOOLS TO CREATE A WORK OF ART

I have attempted to organize this book with busy parents like you and me in mind so that no matter where you find yourself on this parenting journey, there is help within easy reach. Each chapter is

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divided into two parts: The first section contains stories about me and my family, illustrating common issues that we as parents most often face. I have found that I learn the most about child-rearing by talking with a fellow mom over a cup of tea as we share our struggles, victories, and ideas. It is from this viewpoint that I offer my insights on such subjects as sibling conflict, respect, spanking, failure, reaching the heart, and discipline.

The second section of each chapter, the “Toolbox,” is my favorite part. Over the years, I have gathered a variety of creative yet practical ideas from moms all across the country. I have also come up with many tips of my own in an effort to make my role as a parent both effective and fun. Raising three unique children, including one that exhibits ADHD symptoms nine months out of the year, has required a mixture of approaches. Those ideas make up each chapter’s toolbox.

As you well know, the parenting adventure is different with each child—and it’s vital to recognize and adapt to your children’s various temperaments, strengths, and weaknesses. Think of yourself as a sculptor shaping and molding the lives of your young ones. With each child, you may be working with a different medium. You could be endeavoring to form one youngster who appears to be as hard as marble. As an artist, you might use a chisel, hammers, even water, while sculpting your masterpiece. You may have another child who is more pliable, like clay. Even then, as a potter, you might use fire, a knife, and your bare hands.

It doesn’t matter what substance you’re working with, be it wood, ice, bronze, wax, sand, steel, or foam. Each raw material requires a distinct combination of tools to strike the balance between respecting its uniqueness and steadfastly pursuing the potential beauty within.

In the “Toolbox” section at the end of each chapter, I will present different tools and creative ways to use them as we allow the Lord to work through us, shaping our children in His image (see Colossians 3:10). Let’s take a sneak peek into my “supply closet.” I have found *storytelling* to be an enjoyable and effective way to reach the hearts of children, while *rewards* keep hope alive. *Scripture* instills a respect for authority, and teaching children an *eternal perspective* will help keep them on track. Finally, *prayer* is the master tool of the trade, for both parents and kids. As you’ll see, there’s no reason discipline has to be boring!

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Hopefully, once you’ve finished reading *Creative Correction*, you’ll have gleaned a few nuggets of wisdom. To keep those ideas accessible, put a book mark in the “Topical Index.” That way, whenever you find yourself in a tough parenting situation, you can easily find a solution.

For instance, perhaps you’ve caught your little one in a lie. Go to the back of the book, find “Lying” in the index, turn to the page(s) listed, and choose the tool you think would be most effective in your particular situation. It may be a story written in the second half of chapter three that illustrates the importance of honesty. The index may also lead you to related scriptures listed at the end of chapter two. If you’re searching for creative methods of discipline—a punishment to fit the “crime”—you might turn to chapter five. Or you could flip to chapter four after determining that your child’s lying is slowly becoming a habit and should be broken by setting up an incentive program. Finally, if one of my children has had a problem with a given discipline issue, the page number listed in italic will show you how I chose to handle the situation.

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Experiment. If one idea doesn't work, try something else and come at it from another direction. But don't dismiss a failed method altogether; it may work on another child or at another stage of childhood. Believe me, your departure from the ordinary ways of correction will keep your kids on their toes, wondering what you'll next pull out of your bag of tricks. The road is long, but it doesn't have to be dull.

I sincerely wish parenting were simple, but it's not. It is my hope, however, that this book will, in some way, make your journey a little easier. But if I can't help in that area, I'll shoot for "more enjoyable" at least—which reminds me of the time I reprimanded Tucker for fooling around during a kindergarten lesson. Exasperated, I told him, "Tucker, the more you goof around, the longer this is going to take."

"And the funner it's going to be!" he responded with a grin.

When it comes to parenting, I agree with Tucker. Goof around a little. It will make the journey "funner!"

Afterword

I sincerely hope that you have found at least one or two ideas in this book that you'll be able to use. I hope you have gained confidence in your own instincts and ability to hear some of God's creative suggestions for raising your child.

As you come up with creative correction ideas, stories, or object lessons, would you consider submitting them to me at my Web site, www.LisaWhelchel.com? I'll continue to collect these ideas to offer in further revisions of this book. You will not only be helping me, but more importantly, other parents who are also struggling to find fresh and effective ways to train their children.

If you're interested in continuing to build a "virtual" friendship—one that I hope has already begun with this book—you're welcome to join me online once a week for "Coffee Talk." Every Monday morning, I post a journal entry, along with personal family photos, recounting some of the things I'm experiencing and learning as my children continue to grow through new seasons of life. Or you can simply sign up for my e-letter and I'll send you a monthly e-mail with a personal story, a parenting tip, and a list of cities where I'll be speaking.

I would love a chance to meet you in person someday. But until then, may God bless you richly as you raise your children.

Study Guide

LESSON 1 (CHAPTER 1):

1. In the opening story, Lisa, the author, describes feeling harried and provides a lengthy list of what she feels she lets “slide” in her life. Think about your own list. What, if anything, do you let slide?
2. What are your priorities as a parent? Does your list reflect those priorities? If not, what things or people are getting in the way?
3. Read Matthew 11:28–30, then answer the following questions:
 - a. Are you weary and burdened, like the crowd Jesus is addressing?
 - b. What constitutes your daily load as a parent?
 - c. What is the “yoke” Jesus is speaking of? Why does He tell those who are heavy laden to learn from Him (v. 29)?
 - d. If you lack peace, what practical steps can you take to let God lighten your load?
4. If parenting resembles a highway (p. 10), where are you on that journey?
5. What roadblocks have you hit along the way? What did you do?
6. When facing a crossroads or detour, where—or to whom—do you usually turn for help or direction?

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7. What are your expectations in reading *Creative Correction*? What parenting goals do you have? Take a moment to write them down—and be sure to refer to them as you work through this book.

LESSON 2 (CHAPTER 2):

1. Lisa states that children learn to relate to God through the example of their parents. With that in mind, how do you think your own kids see God? (If you're not sure, ask them!)
2. To project a healthy image of God, we must first be committed to having a vibrant relationship with Him. What is your relationship with God like?
3. How can you get to know Him better?
4. Besides spending time with God, how can we as parents represent Him to our children in a healthy way?
5. Read Hebrews 12:5–11, then answer these questions:
 - a. Why does God discipline His children?
 - b. What are the benefits of His correction?
 - c. When and how has God disciplined you? What were the results?
6. What motivates you when disciplining your children? Are those motives pure?
7. Lisa also states that when our children trust us, they will obey (pp. 22–23). Do you find that to be true with your family? Explain, using examples.
8. What biblical characters obeyed their heavenly Father out of faith? What was God's response?
9. Respect and love are also essential in teaching our children obedience, but if we are to convey these principles to our kids,

Notes

Chapter Two

1. Pam Forster, *For Instruction in Righteousness*, p. 2, copyright © 1993 by Doorposts, 5905 SW Lookinglass Drive, Gaston, OR 97119, www.doorposts.net. Used by permission.

Chapter Three

1. Corrie Ten Boom, with John and Elizabeth Sherrill, *The Hiding Place* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 1984), p. 31.
2. For parents who are homeschooling their children, Todd and Renee Ellison offer practical materials. Contact Cross-Over on the Internet: Crossover.Ellison.net; by e-mail: Crossover@Ellison.net; by phone: (970) 385-1809; by mail: Cross-Over FLC 7028, 1000 Rim Dr., Durango, CO 81301-3999.

Chapter Ten

1. J. P. Knapp, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, (Basingstoke, Hants, UK: Marshall Morgan and Scott Publications Ltd., 1960)

Topical Index

(Italic numerals identify pages with Lisa's personal stories.)

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